

To: Fritz, Matthew[Fritz.Matthew@epa.gov]
From: Administrator/Ex. 6
Sent: Fri 8/7/2015 11:52:50 PM
Subject: Re: update on Animas River

Let me know if this escalates and I need to be visibly engaged

Sent from my iPhone

On Aug 7, 2015, at 5:43 PM, Fritz, Matthew <Fritz.Matthew@epa.gov> wrote:

Good afternoon Administrator,

I wanted to provide you with an update on the Animas River situation in Colorado.

As tends to be the case with these types of situations, the matter has become a bit more complex and interest is peaking.

The incident stems from Region 8 OSC staff and an EPA contractor assessing a wastewater situation from an abandoned mine on the Animas River. They were working to excavate loose material around a mine tunnel that drains groundwater from the mine when the loose material collapsed – resulting in the release of the contaminated wastewater into the river.

This is a pretty rural area in the SW corner of Colorado. However, the city of Durango is downstream of the mine. You can see from the pictures from yesterday that there is a good deal of iron in the water now flowing downstream – creating the orange tint. In response to the release, Region 8 has initiated a sampling regimen – both in the main column of the river and at several water intake points along the river. Current information is that there are only two jurisdictions – Durango and a smaller town – that capture some drinking water from the Animas. We have been told that in both situations, the jurisdictions do have an adequate water supply – in storage and elsewhere to sustain water supply for a limited period of time.

NOTE: the Animas flows in a southerly direction into New Mexico where it enters the San Juan River. The San Juan takes a hard turn toward the west and a bit north before entering

the Colorado River. For geography purposes – we are in the area of the Four Corners between Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Arizona. In addition to state crossings, these rivers traverse several tribal reservations including the Southern Utes and Navajo.

As of 4:30 PM today – the first results from the tests/samples were in and they were being analyzed. I do not yet have information on the outcome of these first samples but they should be available shortly. At that time they will be shared with the states, locals and tribes. Region 8 has created a webpage for this incident and they will be posting information on that site at regular intervals. (Here is the link <http://epaossc.org/GoldKingMine>)

Activities at the mine site today have included creating resettling ponds to capture any additional flow from the spot where the release occurred.

Sampling work continues as we follow the plume. As of 5:00 PM today, the plume was approximately 3 to 4 miles north of the New Mexico state border.

Restrictions and guidance: Colorado has posted a recreation ban for the stretch of the river in which the release occurred. Local communities – in particular Durango and Glacier City in Colorado - have shut down their water intakes for the time being. Communities in New Mexico have done the same – as a pre-emptive measure. Advice has also been provided to farmers/ranchers in the area – telling them to avoid using the water of irrigation purposes until there is sufficient information available that the water can be used for that purpose. (It is worth noting that the waters closed to the actual breach are no longer discolored – but testing will continue in that stretch due to the potential for other contaminants beyond iron being present.)

Coordination: Region 8 is the lead and they have their EOC up and running. Regions 6 and 9 are sending response staff to work as part of the joint EOC effort. The communications offices from the 3 regions are working with our communications office to stay in synch and utilize the incident command structure to speak with one voice.

External interest: Colorado has been assisting with the effort and Senator Bennet has been following the matter closely. New Mexico (Governor and her state environmental agency

head) have been vocal in their criticism of the agency – the feel they did not receive sufficient notification of a matter that will impact waters in their state. All of our RAs are heavily engaged in this effort – Ron has been in touch on a number of occasions over the past 24 hours with officials in New Mexico. Jared and his staff have keep the appropriate state folks in Arizona aware of the situation – but the plume has a good deal of distance to travel to reach waters there. Shaun was on the ground today in Colorado and he has been engaging all parties – including hosting a community meeting this afternoon and a press availability.

Nichole and Laura are plugged into this matter and I have been keeping Cabinet Affairs apprised of developments.

I would say we are in full operation mode – unified command has been established and information is being provided to impacted jurisdictions and the media. The team will be releasing information at a set time every day to establish a routine.

I hope this is helpful. I will keep you posted as the situation progresses.

Thanks.